Innovative Practice

Putting More Life Into Life Career Courses: The Benefits of a Holistic Wellness Model

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Career and life planning courses are gaining popularity across university campuses. The authors outline curricula for career and life planning courses that integrate a holistic wellness approach with career development. Curriculum and learning activities to enhance the life planning component of the course are included.

Courses that are designed to improve the career-planning abilities of undergraduate students have been implemented in universities since the 1930s; in recent years, they seem to be gaining in popularity (Collins, 1998; Halasz & Kempton, 2000). These courses are developed to meet the needs of a larger number of students for career decision making than can be met by career counseling services alone (Cochran, Hetherington, & Strand, 1980; Johnson & Smouse, 1993; Smith & Gast, 1998). The curricula of these courses vary from career orientation, designed to introduce students to careers offered within a given area of study, to career and life planning courses, which are designed to promote career decision making and self-awareness as well as career orientation and job search skills. Generally, the purposes of these courses include helping students to (a) explore personal, academic, and life goals; (b) develop skills for academic, career, and life planning; and (c) develop a decision-making process for educational and occupational plans (Halasz & Kempton, 2000; Osborne & Usher, 1994).

Career planning is inseparable from students' identity development and lifestyle (Savickas, 1998). Therefore, many authors have suggested the need for holistic career and life planning courses that incorporate the relationship between students' psychological well-being and vocational decision making (Betz & Corning, 1993; Cochran et al., 1980; Higbee & Dwinell, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Schultheiss, 2000). The emphasis in career planning courses to date, however, has been primarily on career planning and skills-oriented interventions (Carver & Smart, 1985; Cochran et al., 1980; Halasz & Kempton, 2000). According to Schultheiss (2000), "There is still a need to acknowledge how personal issues influence career exploration and decision-making" (p. 45). Herr and Long (1987) stated, "Counselors should help clients pursue career and lifestyle development with assertiveness, direction, and focus across the life-span"

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(p. 119). We believe that this holistic and developmental approach should be intentionally integrated into the increasing number of career and life planning courses that are being developed and implemented on university campuses.

In this article, we present a model for infusing holistic and developmental curriculum components into existing career and life planning courses. We describe the rationale for and components of a wellness model (Witmer, Sweeney, & Myers, 1998) and provide examples of the infusion of this model into an existing career and life planning course. Curriculum and learning activities to enhance the life-planning component of the course are included.

The Wheel of Wellness Model

Wellness has been defined by many authors in a variety of ways, most incorporating the "total person" as the target of intervention. In wellness, body, mind, and spirit are integrated in a purposeful manner by the individual, with a goal of living life more fully within all spheres of functioning. Hettler (1984) suggested three major benefits of promoting wellness in universities: (a) It has the potential to increase student retention, (b) student chances for success after graduation are increased, and (c) enhanced wellness will result in greater longevity and will decrease the probability of premature death. Furthermore, college students' sense of psychological well-being has been shown to be influenced by the quality of their lives (Hermon & Hazler, 1999), as measured by the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle (Myers, Sweeney, Witmer, & Hattie, 1998).

The Wheel of Wellness (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Witmer et al., 1998) is a holistic, multidisciplinary model of wellness and prevention over the life span that is grounded in psychological theories of growth and behavior. The model provides an integrated paradigm in which wellness is symbolized in a wheel (Myers et al., 2000). There are a number of components in this circumplex model that are related as follows: (a) All components are necessary for healthy functioning in a holistic manner, (b) all of the components of wellness are interrelated, and (c) change in any one area will affect and create changes in other areas as well. The model is most accurately portrayed as a three-dimensional sphere instead of a one-dimensional model as shown on paper; that is, the wheel is a cross-section of healthy living. In actuality, the wheel "moves" through time and space across the life span. Change is a consistent aspect of wellness, and change may be for better or worse.

There are five major life tasks, which empirical data support as important characteristics of healthy individuals, represented in the Wheel of Wellness (Hattie, Myers, & Sweeney, 2001; Hermon & Hazler, 1999). These life tasks are spirituality; self-direction; work, recreation, and leisure; friendship; and love. These tasks interact dynamically with several life forces, including family, community, religion, education, government, media, and business/industry. The life forces and life tasks interact with and are affected by global events—natural and human, positive as well as negative. In a healthy person, all life tasks are interconnected, and they interact for the well-being or detriment of the individual.

Spirituality is the core of the Wheel of Wellness. *Spirituality* is defined as a sense of meaning or purpose; spiritual concerns are the foundation for the remaining life tasks. The life task of self-direction includes 12 additional components of wellness that are supported by empirical data (Myers et al., 2000): sense of worth, sense of control, realistic beliefs, emotional awareness and coping, problem solving and creativity, sense of humor, nutrition, exercise, self-care, stress management, gender identity, and cultural identity. The tasks of self-direction function much like the spokes in a wheel, creating strength and fostering effective functioning of the whole. All of them are necessary for healthy functioning of the individual.

The life task of work, recreation, and leisure includes values and attitudes toward the meaningful use of one's time. Friendship and love include a continuum of intimate relationships and acquaintances that form one's personal system of social support. All of these tasks require awareness, knowledge, and skills for optimum growth and development of the individual. The Wheel of Wellness can be incorporated into existing counseling knowledge and skills (Myers et al., 2000). Myers et al. (2000) recommended the following steps for integrating the Wheel of Wellness into existing counseling methods, and these steps can be translated into classroom teaching strategies: (a) introduction of the Wheel of Wellness Model, including its life-span focus; (b) formal or informal assessment of the client's wellness, including identification of targeted areas for change; (c) intentional interventions to enhance wellness in targeted areas; and (d) evaluation and follow-up.

Infusion of Wellness Into a Career and Life Planning Course

In this section, we describe a model for infusion of the Wheel of Wellness components into a career and life planning course. In order to build on the success of career assessment methods at facilitating students' progress in self-awareness and career decision making, an assessment of wellness is added to the career planning course requirements. We have used the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle (WEL) inventory (Myers, Sweeney, et al., 1998), a paper-and-pencil measure of the dimensions included in the Wheel of Wellness described earlier in this article. The WEL inventory has acceptable reliability and concurrent validity with similar measures (Hattie et al., 2001). Students receive a profile of their scores with an option of comparisons with norm groups comprising other undergraduate students. These scores can be used as the basis for developing a personal wellness plan, which is then implemented over the course of the academic term. Students are encouraged to use the wellness model throughout the course as an ongoing strength-based assessment that can serve as a foundation for career planning. Students are also encouraged to individualize their personal wellness plan to incorporate their personal and career interests.

The following integration of the WEL inventory and the personal wellness project has been used in a career and life planning course.

1. Early in the course, an overview of the Wheel of Wellness is presented and discussed, and the WEL inventory is administered with other vocational assessments. Discussion includes the components of the wheel and the characteristics of healthy persons, focusing on how they are related to lifestyle (Myers, Witmer, & Sweeney, 1998).

2. A few weeks into the semester, the results of the WEL inventory are interpreted in class. Guidelines for interpretation of the WEL include the development of a wellness profile and analysis of the scores. At this time, students reflect on the meaning of their scores, and they may be asked questions such as "How do you feel about your scores on the WEL?" and "How do you interpret your scores?" Then, students may be asked to select one, two, or three scores that are most important or surprising to them, or both, and explain why. Finally, students are asked how the scores reflect their personal awareness and career decision making.

3. After the interpretation of the WEL, activities to enhance personal wellness are taken from the *Wellness Workbook* (Myers, Witmer, et al., 1998). During class activities, students reflect on their satisfaction with their scores, the goals and objectives that they have developed for enhancing one or more of their scores, the personal assets and barriers that relate to achieving their goals, the personal resources for achieving greater wellness, and the methods and strategies for achieving greater wellness (Myers, Witmer, et al., 1998).

4. Students then develop short- and long-term goals for their personal wellness and identify one or two areas that they would like to improve. Students are asked to "think" ahead 1, 2, 3, or 5 years; imagine their career and lifestyle; and identify wellness goals they would like to achieve. Then, they may identify one or two areas that they would like to improve and describe what they can do about these now (Myers, Witmer, et al., 1998).

5. The personal wellness project is conducted over the remainder of the semester. The personal wellness plan includes the definition of one or more wellness life tasks (chosen by the student); the score on the WEL for each task chosen; a rating from 1 to 10 of how satisfied the student is with his or her score(s); a rating of 1 to 6 indicating how ready or willing the student is to make changes in each life task chosen; and the student's goals, methods, and resources for each life task chosen (Myers, Witmer, et al., 1998). These projects should center on one (or more) of the five life tasks of wellness depicted in the model: (a) spirituality; (b) self-direction; (c) work, recreation, and leisure; (d) friendship; and (e) love. Resources and tips for the development of the wellness plan are provided in the *Wellness Workbook* (Myers, Witmer, et al., 1998).

6. Progress on the personal wellness project is evaluated throughout the semester, using class discussions, small-group discussions, and short written assignments. The following questions might be included: "How is your project progressing?" "What are your personal reactions to your project?" "What are you learning about yourself and your career decision making (e.g., strengths, barriers)?" "If you could change your project, how would it change?" "What additional information or resources would be helpful for your project?"

7. In the final weeks of the semester, the results of the personal wellness project may be easily integrated into the career development activities of students. In our course, students develop a life career autobiography. As a final course requirement, they are asked to integrate their wellness project into this autobiography, with a resulting document that provides a holistic perspective on their development in several major life areas, including but not limited to their career choices.

This model was implemented over several semesters. Both instructors and students realized the benefit of the expanded view of life and career that a wellness focus offers the career and life planning curriculum. With the addition of the wellness model, students more carefully explored the influences of their lifestyle on the career-planning decisions examined during the course. In course evaluations across several semesters, the infusion of wellness throughout the curriculum was often named as one of the most helpful components of the course.

Conclusion

Career choices are increasingly made in the context of life planning, as exemplified in the concept of life career. Although career planning courses are in place in many universities, it is often the case that life planning receives little attention in the course curriculum. To address this issue, a holistic model of wellness was presented as the basis for infusing a greater emphasis on life planning into existing courses in career and life planning for undergraduates. Curricular resources, assessments, and specialized projects were presented as methods for encouraging students to examine their own wellness and to develop plans to optimize their lifestyle choices.

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